



U.S. General Services Administration

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GSA's Investment in the Federal Courts

Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Internet
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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Goodlatte, Chairman Coble, Ranking Member Nadler, and members of the Committee. My name is Michael Gelber, and I am the Deputy Commissioner of GSA's Public Buildings Service.

GSA's mission is to deliver the best value in real estate, acquisition, and technology services to government and the American people. As part of this mission, GSA maintains a close partnership with the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts to meet the nationwide space needs of the Judiciary in as cost-effective a manner as possible.

I look forward to outlining our partnership with the Courts, how investments for the Judiciary's space needs are jointly prioritized, challenges facing these investments, and joint efforts to improve planning and drive down the overall cost of the Judiciary's space needs.

GSA's Ongoing Partnership with the Courts

U.S. courthouses often are prominent historic landmarks. They represent the stability and dignity of the Federal Government, and the Judiciary's important and distinct role in Federal operations. GSA works with the U.S. Courts to create and maintain facilities that expedite the efficient and secure administration of justice. GSA is keenly aware of these buildings' importance as symbols and community anchors, and our partnership with the Courts takes these civic values into consideration.

A significant representation of this partnership is GSA's work to make needed investments both in new Courthouses prioritized by the Courts, as well as existing facilities where the Judiciary retains long-term space needs.

Construction of New Federal Courthouses

In selecting courthouse construction projects, the Courts identify their most pressing space, security, and other operational needs. Since 1996, the Judiciary has used long-range facilities planning to prioritize proposed new construction. The Courts' 5-year plan incorporates a number of best practices for capital planning, and GSA works to include projects from the finalized 5-year plan into GSA's annual appropriations requests. For the projects that Congress approves and appropriates, such as Mobile, Alabama, in Fiscal Year 2014, GSA pursues design solutions that maximize the positive civic impact of budgeted resources.

Since Congress began funding a nationwide courthouse construction program nearly 20 years ago, GSA has completed construction of 79 new courthouses and annexes across the country. Federal courthouses today comprise nearly one-quarter of GSA's owned portfolio.

Investments in the Existing Federal Courthouse Inventory

At the same time GSA works to pursue new Courthouse construction based on the Courts' identified needs, GSA also executes critical major repair and alteration projects at existing Courthouses within the Federal inventory. Unfortunately, between Fiscal Years 2011 – 2013, GSA's capital budget requests were cut more than \$2 billion, severely curtailing investment not just for the Courts, but for all partner Federal agencies that GSA serves.

The Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations Act was the first year in four fiscal years that GSA received a significant portion of its capital request. The Fiscal Year 2014 Act represented a meaningful step forward in beginning to address the backlog of critical capital projects government-wide. In the Fiscal Year 2014 program, GSA is making more than \$180 million in specific, significant investments in Federal Courts through major repair and alteration projects in Mobile, Alabama; Los Angeles, California; and Detroit, Michigan. In the Fiscal Year 2015 budget, GSA is requesting more than \$90 million for investments in support of the Courts.

For example, GSA is executing a multi-phase renovation of the historic Theodore Levin U.S. Courthouse in Detroit, Michigan, to replace building systems that have reached the end of their useful lives. The project will correct serious building deficiencies and ensure that the Judiciary, as well as the Executive Branch agencies located in the facility, have a long-term housing solution in a safe and modern work environment.

The FY 2015 Budget Request also includes \$20 million to improve physical security in buildings occupied by the Judiciary and the U.S. Department of Justice - Marshals Service. This program, established by the Courts, allows GSA to address serious security deficiencies in a timely and less costly manner than new Courthouse construction. GSA's judicial security projects address circulation deficiencies and other security concerns in a range of existing Federal courthouses minimizing the need for the construction of a new courthouse.

If consistency in funding can be restored, GSA will be better able to invest in its Federal inventory. Having access to all the receipts of the Federal Buildings Fund will allow GSA to better address the needs of the Courts and Executive Branch partner agencies that pay rent to GSA.

Improvements to Planning and Execution of the Courthouse Program

While GSA is pursuing strategic investments in partnership with the Courts, GSA and the Courts also are working together to improve the utilization, efficiency, and delivery of Courthouses.

For example, the Judiciary recently implemented policy requiring Judges to share courtrooms, and has revised its estimates of future judgeships. These changes have allowed GSA to pursue smaller and less costly new Courthouse construction projects. In some cases, these

improvements have eliminated the need for a new Courthouse altogether, allowing for modest renovations to existing space.

For example, in San Jose, California, GSA worked with the Judiciary to reassess a new construction project given new courtroom-sharing requirements. As a result, the Judiciary removed San Jose from the Court's 5-year plan. Rather than moving forward with a costly new construction project, GSA will pursue select upgrades to the existing Robert F. Peckham Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse.

Likewise, GSA worked with the Courts to revise a proposed annex at the U.S. Courthouse in Greenbelt, Maryland. Congress originally approved and appropriated \$10 million to design a 263,000-square-foot expansion with a total estimated project cost of \$128 million. GSA, in partnership with the Judiciary and with approval from Congress, instead used the existing funding to pursue a renovation of the existing Courthouse to meet the Courts' needs.

While working with the Judiciary to reduce its space needs, GSA also strengthened controls that ensure these courthouse projects are constructed within budget. By incorporating Building Information Modeling or BIM, GSA can detail the physical and functional characteristics of a facility so it can continually monitor the building's size and functional efficiency from the inception of design to the opening of the facility.

Over the past several years, GSA worked with the Courts to revise and reduce the requirements for almost every courthouse on the Courts' 5-year plan, as well as enhance the level of oversight on all projects that move forward. GSA will continue collaborating with the Courts to reduce courthouses' costs while maximizing their functionality and civic benefit. At the same time, GSA always welcomes suggestions and opportunities for improvement from this Committee and other Congressional stakeholders.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about our ongoing partnership with the Courts to effectively and efficiently address the Judiciary's space needs. On behalf of GSA and the Public Buildings Service, I welcome the opportunity to discuss GSA's commitment to smart, strategic investment in the Federal Courthouse program. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.